

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00 SP-02

L-01 HA-02 ARA-10 EUR-08 PM-03 DODE-00 IO-06

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P 121435Z MAY 78

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8378

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 2165

LIMDIS

DEPT PASS HORN OF AFRICA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PINS, CU, ET, SO, UR, US

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE OPENING FOR US IN ETHIOPIA BILATERAL RE-
LATIONSHIP

REF: (A) ADDIS 2113 (NOTAL); (B) ADDIS 2114 (NOTAL)V (C)

ADDIS 2132 (NOTAL)

BEGIN SUMMARY: COMBINATION OF ETHIOPIAN AGREEMENT FOR NEW
US AMBASSADOR AND POSSIBLE TACTICAL POLICY DIFFERENCES WITH
USSR AND CUBA OVER ERITREA APPEAR TO HAVE PRESENTED US WITH
SMALL OPENING TO IMPROVE US-ETHIOPIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS AND
TO ENCOURAGE ETHIOPIAN NATIONALISM. INTENSE DAY-TO-DAY
ETHIOPIAN PREOCCUPATION OVER OGADEN AND ITS OWN TERRITORIAL
INTEGRITY HAS DIMINISHED OVER PAST MONTH AND ATTENTION HAS
POSSIBLY TURNED TO LONGER TERM PROBLEMS WHICH MAY REQUIRE
MORE SOPHISTICATED SOLUTION THAN MILITARY ONE IN OGADEN.
FOREIGN MINISTER FELEKE SEEMED TO SUGGEST IN MAY 10 MEETING
THERE IS ROLE FOR US IN RESOLVING THESE PROBLEMS WHICH MAY
BE WORTH EXPLORING. END SUMMARY.

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1. EMBASSY HAS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY THAT ETHIOPIAN GOVT (PMGSE)
DECISION TO ACCEPT NEW US AMBASSADOR WOULD BE POLITICAL ONE BASED
ON STATE OF ETHIOPIA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS AND COINCIDENCE WITH
FACTORS EXTERNAL TO US-ETHIOPIAN BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP.
SUFFICIENT EFFORTS HAD BEEN EXERTED ON BEHALF OF OUR GETTING
AGREEMENT MANY WEEKS BEFORE IT WAS ACTUALLY GRANTED, LEADING
TO ASSUMPTION THAT TIMING OF EARLY MAY RESPONSE WAS DECIDED

BY HIGHEST LEVELS OF PMGSE, PROBABLY BY MENGISTU HIMSELF. THEREFORE, IT IS USEFUL TO EXAMINE WHY AT THIS MOMENT AND FOR WHAT REASONS, PMGSE FINALLY ACCEDED TO RAISING LEVEL OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS.

2. AGREEMENT COMES STRIKINGLY CLOSE ON HEELS OF MAJOR VISITS TO MOSCOW AND HAVANA BY CHAIRMAN MENGISTU DURING WHICH, IT IS BELIEVED, QUESTION OF ERITREA WAS MOST PROMINENT ISSUE AMONG MANY CENTRAL TO TRILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. AGREEMENT ALSO COINCIDES WITH DIMINUTION OF PMGSE ANTI-US RHETORIC PAST THREE WEEKS, CESSATION OF MOST VIOLENT ASPECTS OF RED TERROR CAMPAIGN, CONTINUING GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN OGADEN, SOME EVIDENCE OF RESTRAINTS PLACED ON CIVILIAN POLITICAL GROUPS, AND ASSURANCE OF SUFFICIENT AND CONTINUING MILITARY SUPPLIES. SIMILAR TO "WARMING" IN AUGUST 1977 OF US-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS, IT APPEARS THAT ETHIOPIANS MAY PERCEIVE SOME VALUE, WHETHER MERELY TACTICAL OR SINCERE, IN IMPROVED RELATIONS. THIS IS ALSO REFLECTED IN CORDIAL MENGISTU MEETING WITH DEPARTING FRENCH AMBASSADOR AND REPORTEDLY WARM RECEPTION CURRENTLY BEING GIVEN VISITING ITALIAN MISSION.

3. FONMIN STATED DURING MAY 10 MEETING THAT US COULD PLAY POSITIVE ROLE IN ERITREA, "BY COUNSELING YOUR ARAB FRIENDS IN REGION" TO CEASE PROVIDING WEAPONS TO ERITREAN SECESSIONISTS. THIS POINT ALSO WAS MADE ON AT LEAST TWO OCCASIONS DURING AARON VISIT, ONCE BY MENGISTU AND ONCE AT FOREIGN MINISTRY (MOFA).
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OBLIQUE APPEAL TO US ON ERITREA IS ONLY ONE ASPECT OF OVERALL ETHIOPIAN DIPLOMATIC EFFORT TO ISOLATE ERITREANS FROM ALL SOURCES OF MILITARY SUPPLY (SEE ADDIS 1399). BY REITERATING POSSIBILITY OF US ROLE IN ERITREA, FONMIN MAY JUST HAVE BEEN MOUTHING "PARTY LINE," BUT THEN AGAIN PMGSE MAY HAVE CREATED OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO ENLARGE GAP WHICH APPEARS TO EXIST BETWEEN ETHIOPIANS AND THEIR SOVIET/CUBAN ALLIES ON TACTICS TO SOLVE ERITREAN QUESTION.

4. IN THIS REGARD, ACCEPTANCE OF US AMBASSADOR MAY ONLY BE CHEAP DEVICE BY MENGISTU TO PROD HIS ALLIES INTO MORE ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT FOR HIS POLICES IN ERITREA AND NOT REPRESENT ANY REAL "THAW" IN US BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. GIVEN MENGISTU ACTIONS IN PAST TO EXPLOIT SUPER POWER RIVALRY FOR HIS OWN ADVANTAGE, EMBASSY BELIVES THAT WARMING TREND IS FOR TACTICAL REASONS AND DOES NOT YET REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT TRENT AWAY FROM SOVIETS OR CUBANS. FUTURE EVENTS MAY DISPROVE THIS, BUT UNTIL THERE ARE MORE SUBSTANTIAL SIGNS WHICH ENTAIL SOME COST TO PMGSE IN ITS RELATIONS WITH SOVIETS AND CUBANS, THERE IS NO REASON TO BE MORE THAN MILDLY OPTIMISTIC THAT ETHIOPIA WILL BECOME TRULY "NON-ALIGNED" IN SHORT TERM.

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8379

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 2165

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5. ANOTHER REASON FOR AGREEMENT AT THIS TIME COULD BE ETHIOPIAN REALIZATION THAT ALTHOUGH CONVENTIONAL WAR WITH SOMALIA IS OVER IN OGADEN, CONTINUING GUERRILLA ACTIVITY THERE IS DRAIN ON SCARCE RESOURCES REQUIRING LONG RANGE, NON-MILITARY SOLUTION. ETHIOPIANS MAY HOPE TO FORESTALL ANY US MILITARY SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH SOMALIA BY IMPROVING BILATERAL RELATIONS. THEY ALSO MAY WISH THAT US COUNSEL SOMALIS TO EXERCISE CONSTRAINT IN OGADEN SO THAT PMGSE CAN REDUCE ITS NEED FOR CUBAN TROOPS AS EXPRESSED TO AARON MISSION.

6. ETHIOPIA'S TWO MAJOR CONCERNS CONTINUE TO BE ERITREA AND THE OGADEN, WITH ERITREA OF GREATER IMPORTANCE NOW. WITH ETHIOPIA HAVING A RELATIVELY ASSURED MAJOR SOURCE OF MILITARY SUPPLY, SOMETHING WHICH THE ERITREANS AND SOMALIS DO NOT, THE EVENTUAL MILITARY OUTCOME SHOULD FAVOR ETHIOPIA IN LONG TERM. MORE DIFFICULT ASPECTS OF TWO PROBLEMS ARE POLITICAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC REHABILITATION, AREAS IN WHICH US COULD PLAY SIGNIFICANT ROLE IF THERE WOULD BE VISIBLE GAINS FOR US IN REGION. HOWEVER, IF US DID DECIDE TO OFFER ETHIOPIANS MAJOR POLITICAL ASSISTANCE, IT WOULD BE ESSENTIAL TO OBTAIN ASSURANCES FROM MENGISTU HIMSELF ABOUT NATURE OF GAINS FOR US, SIMILAR TO ONES HE GAVE AARON MISSION ABOUT NOT CROSSING BRODER AND HAS HONORED DESPITE PRESSURES TO INFLICT

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PUNITIVE DAMAGES ON SOMALIA.

7. EMBASSY IS AWARE OF INTENSE REGIONAL CONCERN AMONG SAUDIS, SUDANESE, EGYPTIANS AND ISRAELIS OVER LARGE SOVIET/CUBAN PRESENCE. US SHARES THIS CONCERN AND WOULD HAVE TO JUSTIFY "PRO-ETHIOPIAN" POLICY DIRECTION IN TERMS OF DIFFERENCE OVER TACTICS AND NOT OVER COMMON OBJECTIVE. ARGUMENTS THAT MIGHT BE LISTENED TO ARE, FOR EXAMPLE, CONTINUATION OF MILITARY OPPOSITION TO PMGSE PROVIDES JUSTIFICATION FOR HARDENING OF SOVIET/CUBAN MILITARY INFLUENCE; AN INDEPENDENT ERITREA IS LIKELY TO BECOME A MORE TRULY MARXIST STATE ON RED SEA THAN ETHIOPIA AND ENJOY FULLER SOVIET SUPPORT; IF RELATIONS WERE TO SOUR BETWEEN USSR AND MENGISTU, SUCH A STATE WOULD POSE GREATER DANGER TO NIMEIRI REGIME; ETHIOPIANS HAVE DEMONSTRATED GREAT RESTRAINT IN FACE OF CONTINUING SOMALI PROVOCATIONS AND SCRUPULOUS RESPECT FOR SOMALIA'S FRONTIER, THUS UNDERCUTTING SOMALIA'S ARGUMENTS FOR REARMING ITSELF AGAINST THREAT OF ETHIOPIAN INVASION. (WE KNOW, OF COURSE, THAT ETHIOPIAN CONTINGENCY PLANNING INCLUDES OVERT AND COVERT MILITARY ACTIVITIES INSIDE SOMALIA.)

8. FINALLY, IT APPEARS THAT ETHIOPIAN NATIONALISM IS ISSUE AT STATE IN SMALL OPENING TO US. DESPITE DEPENDENT MILITARY RELATIONSHIP, THERE WILL CONTINUE TO BE AREAS WHERE ETHIOPIA AND SOVIET UNION HAVE DIFFERING NATIONAL INTERESTS. WHILE EMBASSY DOES NOT EXPECT ETHIOPIA TO SWING BACK INTO WESTERN SPHERE IN NEAR TERM, OPPORTUNITIES WHICH ARISE FOR US TO EXPLOIT POLICY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN USSR AND PMGSE, TO REINFORCE TRADITIONAL ETHIOPIAN XENOPHOBIC ATTITUDES AND TO ENHANCE ETHIOPIAN NATIONALISM AT COST OF SOVIET DEPENDENCY, THUS ENCOURAGING TRU NON-ALIGNMENT, HAVE SOME VALUE IN PURSUING, OR AT LEAST EXPLORING.

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